This is the author's unedited preprint version of this article.


Tanya Levin joined the Hills Christian Life Centre, the church that became Hillsong, in her early teens. Now thirty-six, she is still scarred by the experience of growing up among Pentacostals who increasingly preached the gospel of prosperity, stunted their congregation’s intellectual growth, and oppressed their women. She has asked some very awkward questions of the church leaders, about money and accountability for past crimes. For her pains she has been literally thrown out of Hillsong and banned from returning.

She tells her story with passion and wit, backed up by thorough research and many personal interviews, and diary entries from her teenage days. Her own intellect, as it developed, refused to be fooled by the chopped logic of a belief in free will which offers only a choice between doing what you’re told or going to hell, but, as she says, fundamentalism can make you crazy, and she has had years of their brainwashing to overcome. She includes a biting ‘dictionary’ of ‘Christianese’: ‘Immorality: anything at all to do with sex outside of marriage … Blessing (n): Source of money’ etc. She now realises that it’s ‘difficult for anyone literate to make sense of the illogical psychobabble that pours out of the pulpit’, and that ‘the freedom to say “I don’t know” is magnificent, since there no longer needs to be an answer’.

Although the basics of chronology and causality are sometimes confusing, this comes from an apparent commitment to ‘writing as one speaks’ which gives the book a unique directness. People in Glass Houses is a solid piece of work, deeply personal
and anguished, intelligent and sharp-eyed about both the many flaws in the Assembly of God credo, and its appeal, however transitory, to thousands of Australians.